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Auditing Inequity: Teaching Aspiring Administrators to Be Social Justice Leaders

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Comments
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Auditing Inequity: Teaching Aspiring Administrators to Be Social Justice Leaders

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There are three intersecting trends which influence the current work of U.S. educational administration preparation programs. First, schools in the United States are becoming more ethnically and linguistically diverse, while the White population is decreasing (Fry 2006; Pew Charitable Trusts 2009; U.S. Census Bureau 2001). Even states which have traditionally been demographically homogenous are serving more students of colour. The K-12 student enrolment of Latino/as in Iowa, for example, increased nearly 88% from the 1999 school year to the 2006 school year (State Data Center of Iowa and the Iowa Division of Latino Affairs 2007.).

Second, although enrolment demographics are changing, the achievement gap between affluent students and poor students and between White students and students of colour continues as it has over time (Bankston and Caldas 1996; Entwisle and Alexander 1992; Farkas 2003; Halle *et al.* 2009; Harris and Herrington 2006; Jencks and Phillips 1998; Munoz and Dossett 2001; Sherman and Grogan 2003; Singham 1998; Vanneman *et al.* 2009). Less affluent students and students of colour are both segregated from their school peers throughout the school day and overrepresented in special education and other remedial educational programs (Capper *et al.* 2000; Coutinho and Oswald 2000; Ladson-Billings 1994; Orfield 2001). Finally, since *No Child Left Behind* legislation (http://www.ed.gov/nclb) in the U.S. in 2001, which requires that schools disaggregate and report the achievement of their economically disadvantaged students, students of colour, and students with special needs, every administrator is now held publicly accountable for the success of all children. In England, the 2007 Children's Plan (Department for Children 2007) has presented a similar goal that every child succeed. Educational administration preparation programs, now more than ever before, must prepare school leaders to meet the challenges of changing

demographics, the achievement gap, and leaving no child behind. The question is: *How* should preparation programs do so?

The educational administration literature has answered this question of how preparation programs should prepare leaders by calling for programs to prepare educational leaders who can lead for social justice. The definition of a leader oriented towards social justice is one who questions the status quo of leaving some children behind and who works towards the equitable treatment and achievement of all children. Several authors have identified knowledge and practices that such social justice leaders would require (Cambron-McCabe and McCarthy 2005; Goldring and Greenfield 2002; Grogan and Andrews 2002; Marshall 2004; Murphy 2002; Pounder *et al.* 2002; Scheurich 1998; Scheurich and Skrla 2003; Stevenson 2007; Theoharis 2007). Cambron-McCabe and McCarthy, for example, say that social justice leaders must

> reconstruct roles and relationships at the school level around a vibrant core purpose focused on social justice and directed at improving student learning. This cannot be accomplished without concentrated expertise in teaching and learning. School leaders must possess high quality instructional skills, be able to support the learning of both students and adults in the school, raise critical issues concerning equity and privilege, and be able to provide leadership for collective responsibility for school improvement (p. 215).

These skills are difficult, and more recently McKenzie and colleagues (2008) have cautioned that "the perfect social justice leader or the perfect social justice school does not exist" (p. 114). Instead of aiming for creating the perfect leader, they say that preparation programs can instead hope that "leaders realize their unevenness in the application of social justice and strive to close the gap between the ideal and the application" (p. 114).

A few authors have suggested pedagogical practices which faculty could implement into educational administration preparation programs to prepare such social-justice-oriented leaders (Adams *et al.* 1997; Brown 2004b; 2006; Hafner 2006; McKenzie *et al.* 2008; Nagda

et al. 2003; Pounder *et al.* 2002). Sometimes these pedagogical suggestions come from the related field of multicultural teacher education; others are more generalist. Bell and Griffin (1997), for example, have identified sequences of learning around which social justice courses can be designed. Others have suggested pedagogical techniques such as cultural plunges, reflective writing, neighbourhood walks, home visits, and equity audits. Often these techniques are grounded in transformational learning theory, which suggests that designing an experience which transforms students' hearts and minds promotes learning and will eventually transform their actions. These techniques can be included within individual courses or infused throughout preparation programs.

What has been largely missing from the literature (see, however, Bruner 2008) is a discussion of *how* students respond to some of these pedagogical practices and *what aspiring administrators currently think* about the two constructs which have been most established in the inequitable treatment and achievement of students: poverty and race/ethnicity. This paper presents results from an exploratory study analyzing what ten aspiring administrators in one preparation program have written about poverty and race/ethnicity and how their thinking seemed to change over the course towards social justice leadership. Implications for preparation programs follow in the discussion section.

Design and Data Collection

This exploratory qualitative study analyzes the reflections and other written assignments from ten aspiring principals enrolled in the penultimate course of a principal preparation program in a small state in the United States that in 2007 was 94% Anglo. The researchers chose to analyze assignments from this course because its placement at the end of the program suggested that students' thinking would be most developed at that point in the

program and most indicative of their "final" thoughts before concluding the program and seeking their first administrative position.

The researchers chose to analyze written reflections and assignments because there is a strong research base for using written reflections as a pedagogical tool to enhance adult learning, particularly learning which requires a change in belief or attitude (see, for example, Mezirow 1997). Reflections are thus common in courses which attempt to teach multicultural awareness of issues such as poverty and race or ethnicity (Brown 2004a; Cochran-Smith 1995; Garmon 2005; Lauri Johnson 2002a; Kyles and Olafson 2008; Lee 2008; Milner 2003; Ridenour 2004; Young and Laible 2000). Hackman (2005) suggests that ongoing reflection about race is particularly helpful for White students:

> [Self-reflection] seems particularly true for dominant group members in their work to resist the seduction of privilege and to maintain the commitment to social justice work on all fronts. Especially in regards to White privilege, ongoing self-reflection helps Whites continually work to challenge racism and be vigilant about the deconstruction of White privilege in society (p.107).

Courses which require written reflection provide sample questions to prompt introspection as well as sustained and regular accountability to an instructor. The assumption is that practitioners will form a habit of self-reflection and continue it once they leave the program. Research on the reflective practitioner indicates that reflection ultimately leads to changed practice (Mezirow 1998; Osterman and Kottkamp 1993; Schön 1983; Steffy and Wolfe 1997). The written assignments and reflections of these aspiring administrators, therefore, offered a glimpse of what and how they were thinking about poverty and ethnicity, with the research-based assumption that such thinking would influence their current and eventual practice. Each of the assignments is described in detail below. Overall, students wrote 169 double-spaced pages of reflection about poverty or race/ethnicity, with an individual student minimum of 14.5 pages and a maximum of 21 pages.

In accordance with Institutional Review Board ethical guidelines, students gave written consent before participating in the study, with a clear statement in the consent form that their participation would not affect their course grade. At the end of the course, reflections and assignments were collected by a research assistant who removed names and school names. Each aspiring administrator was assigned a number and his or her work was collected into a numbered folder. Reflections were read repeatedly and analyzed by a faculty member from educational administration using an iterative coding process similar to that described by Anfara, Brown, and Mangione (2002). Preliminary themes and findings were checked with the faculty member who taught the course.

Participants and Data Sources

The ten participants were all full-time graduate students in an administrative preparation program. They all also worked full-time in school positions such as kindergarten teacher, special-education teacher, and school activities director. They ranged in their teaching experiences from 2 years to 25 years, and in their ages from 28 years to 56 years. All but one participant was White. There were 6 men and 4 women.

This course, which students take towards the end of their program, is entitled "Diverse Learning Needs." The course description says that

> Learner needs will be examined from major psycho/social perspectives with stress upon developmental phases of normal growth along with common problems encountered in schools. A second major theme will be issues of racism, gender bias, and socio-economic problems that influence learner responsiveness to school curricula and administrative regulations, routines, and legal requirements.
>
> The course is also designed to introduce students to a variety of support personnel and services in elementary and secondary schools and how these personnel and services can meet the needs of students of all abilities in integrated educational environments.

In order to meet these stated goals, the course required an equity audit (Capper, Frattura, and Keyes, 2000; Scheurich and Skrla 2003; Skrla *et al.* 2004), analysis of how

school programs meet the needs of diverse learners, a vision and goals implementation plan based on that analysis, and written reflections on each topic. Each of these assignments is described in more detail as follows:

Equity audit and analysis: An equity audit, as described by Scheurich and Skrla (2003), uses data from school districts to "identify systematic patterns of inequity internal to the school, patterns that prevent, of form barriers to, our being equally successful with all student groups" (p. 82). This course used an equity audit format developed by Capper, Frattura, and Keyes (2000) which required students to collect data from their schools generally (number of students, number of staff) as well as specific to particular areas. In the equity audit associated with race and ethnicity, for example, students were asked to find the number of students of colour in the school, compare that number with other schools in the district, compare that number for students labelled "at risk" or "gifted," find the number of staff of colour in the school, and report achievement data by ethnicity. They were then required to write a one page analysis, supported by course readings, responding to this prompt:

> Discuss the problems with the phrase, "I don't even see the person's colour," and "But we do not have, or have very few students of colour in our school/district so race isn't an issue here." What do these race/ethnicity data mean? In your analysis, include the strengths and areas for improvement in serving students of colour within your school's curriculum, instruction, and culture, and ideas you have for remedying the weaknesses.

Vision and Goals implementation plan: Once students collected, audited, and analyzed data from their districts, they were asked to write a vision and goals implementation plan where they were to "identify your vision and goals in this educational setting for meeting the needs of all students in integrated educational environments," as "something you would present to your school board or staff." Once the vision was identified, students were asked to outline a five-year plan, including who to involve, when, what structures cultures, or

people are already in place, who likely resisters would be, what factors might affect progress, and a time-line.

Online reflections: Students also were required to post a short reflection about topics throughout the semester using the discussion feature of the university's course management software. The data reported here include the posted reflections on social class and race and ethnicity. For these postings students were asked to reflect on race and social class and write about their personal experience with each topic. For example, students were asked to reflect on questions such as (1) "What did you learn about race growing up? (2) What was your first experience with a different race?" Students were also encouraged to write freely and openly about these topics. They were told that these reflections would not be graded, but were required as part of their work in this course.

Required readings in this course included *Meeting the Needs of Students of All Abilities* (Capper *et al.* 2000), *Using Data to Include the Achievement Gap* (Ruth S. Johnson 2002b); and Scheurich, Skrla, and Johnson on thinking about equity and accountability (2000). Related to social class in particular were Riester, Pursch, and Skrla on principals for social justice (2002) and Brantlinger on social class (1995). Readings related to White privilege included an interview with Christine Sleeter (2000/2001), McIntosh's classic work on unpacking the invisible knapsack of White privilege (1992), and Miner and Peterson (2000). It also included Lawrence and Tatum on White racial identity (2002) and Smith-Maddox and Wheelock on untracking students (1995).

Limitations

The researchers recognize that these results are limited to ten aspiring administrators and to assignments which provide a glimpse of students' thinking about issues that are deep and

complex. However, these students are representative of other students in this particular leadership program and the researchers expect that they are similar to those in other programs that are also largely White. Given the literature on the pedagogy of social justice leadership, these assignments are also typical of those in other leadership programs.

Reflections about Poverty and Social Class

Students collected data on social class at the same time that they collected general information about their schools. The most publicly available and accessible piece of data related to social class in U.S. school districts is the number of students who qualify for free and reduced lunch (See http://www.fns.usda.gov/cga/FactSheets/NSLP_Quick_Facts.htm for federal guidelines). The researchers recognize, as administrators also do, that this data is often under-representative of the number of actual students in poverty, given that many districts require students or families to sign up for the program and that there is still some stigma associated with receiving assistance.

Aspiring administrators compared free and reduced lunch data with the number of students in special education, the number of students labelled "at risk," the number of students in the gifted and talented programs, and the number of students in extracurricular activities such as band or student council. Aspiring administrators also reported math and reading achievement data for students qualifying for free and reduced lunch and compared it to the school average.

Across the categories of how children with free and reduced lunch status were represented in special education, at-risk, gifted and talented programs, or extracurricular activities, aspiring administrators reported variability by school. But in all cases, as predicted by the well-established literature linking social class and low achievement (Berliner 2006;

Coleman 1987; Kingston *et al.* 2003; Kozol 1991; Lyman and Villani 2002; Parcel and Dufur 2001; San Antonio 2004; Sirin 2005), there were fewer students qualifying for free and reduced lunch who tested at the proficient mark in reading and in math than students who did not qualify for free and reduced lunch. Usually this difference was about 20%, so that if the school's average number of students proficient in reading was 70%, there were only 50% of students with free and reduced lunch at that level.

While the results of the audits themselves were interesting, what the researchers concentrated on in analysis was the meaning that aspiring administrators seemed to make of these results as they analyzed them and wrote about the topic of poverty in their reflections. The first finding is that although an achievement gap for students in poverty was a problem in every school, future leaders varied in their first responses to that problem. Some of them suggested practical steps for solving the problem, such as communicating more effectively with families in poverty (two responses), or eliminating the practice of tracking (one response), or offering an online learning, self-directed component (one response). However, some of them offered explanations that seemed to reveal deeper thought about poverty and socioeconomic status. It is those explanations and thoughts which we explore further.

Changing demographics

Three aspiring administrators noted that the demographics of their communities had changed to include more families of lower socioeconomic status and that the school, especially its staff, had not responded to those changes. Said one, whom we'll call Peterson:

> A longitudinal study would show a sharp increase in the number of students eligible for free and reduced lunch (9.62%) over just two years ago. When examining an aggregate elementary population, the number of students eligible for free and reduced lunch (22.6%) is nearly two and a half times that of the high school. ...The type of student that will be attending [high school name] three years from now will be far different than the student that attended three years ago, let alone twenty years ago, making it difficult for our veteran staff to relate.

Peterson continued to reflect on this change in demographics by comparing his or her previous experience at an urban school with his or her current experience in a suburban school, and expressing frustration with colleagues:

> At [suburban school] there is an expectation of middle class to upper class wealth and even people that do not have money attempt to live beyond their means to fit in. This is becoming more of a challenge for many families that are new to [town] and to the many people that have lived and worked here, they expect everyone to come in at the same level. This is just not the case. Our people are not flexible and their lack of appreciation of diversity drives me nuts. If I were in charge, I would make diversity training, particularly in terms of social class, a priority, and work to help change some of the preconceived notions about our people. In the end, we are hurting our kids and our community with this single, White, middle to upper class focus.

Peterson's written vision and implementation plan built upon the idea of diversity training for staff as one way to overcome such lack of staff experience, outlining goals and plans for the professional development of his or her colleagues. Peterson's perceptions of his or her colleagues and neighbours may or may not be accurate, but those perceptions appear to be grounded in data from the equity audit and in Peterson's sincere desire to effect change in order to help both students and community.

Peterson's reflection that school staff tend to be White and middle class and thus find it hard to relate to their K-12 students was echoed by another future administrator, Malone, who talked about the blaming, or deficit thinking, revealed in his or her building:

> Many of the issues our students face are ones that we blame them for not achieving in a system that is not designed for their success. I have heard teachers make comments that are characteristic of the deficit-thinking model. Students of low SES are labelled as low achievers and that they are not willing to work hard at school to be successful. Some of this thinking comes from the fact that 92% of staff are White middle class. Their views are shaped by the values of our middle class and that education is important to be successful. Many find it difficult to understand that not all parents are concerned with their child attending college.

Both of these future leaders referred to the staff in their buildings as White and middle class, conflating the two characteristics. Given the data that they collected revealing the paucity of teachers of colour in their building, and given that teachers are required to be college-

educated, such a conflation seems logical. However, the authors noted that middle-class status and Whiteness seemed to be conflated in other responses also. Of the three students who referred to a community demographic shift in socioeconomic status, for example, two of those students also referred to that shift including minority families. Said one about the reflection on social class, "It is difficult to separate this reflection from the reflection on ethnicity. At my school, a large number of students who are minorities are also on free and reduced lunch." This student's observation seemed to be based on the data collected from the audit rather than an automatic mental link between middle-class status and Whiteness, but the authors feel that such a link should be considered and addressed throughout the leadership preparation program.

Self-Reflection Varies: Questioning, Class-Blind, Sitting Back

Students revealed at least three different approaches to thinking about social class which the researchers have categorized as questioning, class-blind, and sitting back. The first approach, questioning, emerged as students seemed to wrestle with their own social class and its implications for their teaching and leadership. One wrote, for example:

> I have begun to think about social class the way that I think about race. I was born into the middle upper class and never thought that people lived much differently than I did. … I know that I have always tried to ignore money. …I say all this to talk about how I teach. I still am very blind to people's social class status. I don't ask, I don't expect them to tell…however, because I am not very observant, I also can't really connect with students that come from a lower social class background. I am ashamed to say I teach to the middle and upper class kids…students who are like me. I think for any teacher it is difficult to teach to students who are different from you. However, now that I know what I have been doing, at least it is now at the front of my mind and I can better prepare myself to teach to other types of students. Hopefully I will be a better teacher after all of these reflections.

The authors interpret this reflection as an example of how self-questioning might influence an educator's practice, or at least the resolution to change one's practice.

Three future administrators wrote about their own lower social class upbringings, whether on a farm, as an immigrant, or from a single-parent family, using those experiences as examples of the way they could relate to their low-socioeconomic status students now. Of these, perhaps the most evocative came from a future leader, Baker, who referred to his or her social class values and beliefs as "mixed" and whose language was both offensive and self-reflective.

On the offensive side, Baker wrote:

> I believe that each social class level believes in family and the idea of its importance. I think the differences lie in how each social class supports the other family members. Is the support given with love, money, or beatings?

The researchers found Baker's idea that support would be offered with beatings to be offensive, though acknowledge that perhaps Baker was trying to be hyperbolic or amusing. Regardless, Baker continued in a self-reflective vein:

> Now that I am a teacher I am trying hard to leave my beliefs and values at home. It is not so hard when I am working with families who are like myself. The difficulty lies in those families who in my opinion do not spend enough time with their kids or just leave the nannies to do all the work. I am very proud of myself because I am trying to educate myself and learn about all of the social classes. I want to know what makes them "tick" and how they come to making decisions. I hope that by being open with myself and aware of my biases that I can become a more open person who is accepting of all types of people.

Baker is aware of his or her biases and wishes to overcome them. The researchers find it a bit troubling that Baker believes that all members of a particular social class reach decisions in a particular way, and wonder, especially when combined with Baker's earlier comments about each class's means of showing family support, if Baker's quest for self-education might lead to broader stereotyping instead of understanding.

We categorized three future leaders' responses as "class blind," since they seemed to display the same kind of "blindness" about social class that other scholars have identified

about race. Class blind responses minimized the importance of class. Of these responses, one from Davis indicated that social class differences shouldn't exist:

> Even though there should be no social class system in the United States, there is one. People make the social class system with their beliefs and attitudes toward different aspects of life. It is all in the mind of the beholder.

Not only does Davis say class should not exist, but Davis also seems to suggest that it *would* not exist if people would simply change their beliefs and attitudes. Davis continues by suggesting that these beliefs and attitudes are carried out by administrators and staff and picked up by students:

> The beliefs and attitudes of the administration and staff members can affect how the students see themselves. There are always some students that get less than the equal treatment that they deserve. It is irritating when an administrator or a staff member says a student can't learn because he is from a certain family. It should not matter; it is the child right then and there that matters. We get the child that they send us and we should make sure that child gets the best of our thoughts, time, and teaching strategies. He cannot help it; who his family is; but yet we teach as if it is his fault. Teach the child given to us to the best of his ability.

One of the purposes of the equity audit assignment is for leaders to recognize that students are treated inequitably. Davis has identified that inequitable treatment and is irritated by it. But there is a tension here between Davis' ideal and reality. Davis wishes to teach the child to the best of the child's ability and wants equitable treatment for all, but does not want to acknowledge that social class differences might exist or might be relevant. However, acknowledging those differences is critical to culturally relevant pedagogy, which the authors of this paper argue is as applicable to students of low-socioeconomic status as it is to ethnic minority students. Davis already believes in Ladson-Billings'(1995) first tenet of culturally relevant pedagogy, the academic success of all students. But Davis' refusal to acknowledge class differences prevents the implementation of the next two tenets of culturally relevant pedagogy, cultural competence and critical consciousness. It is not possible to teach cultural

competence in or critical consciousness of social class if one refuses to accept that it exists. This tension between the ideal of a classless society and the reality of students from poverty who are both treated inequitably and achieve at lower levels exists in most U.S. schools. Some schools in the U.S. attempt to educate their staff about class differences by using materials from Payne's book, *Understanding Poverty* (2005). However, Payne's work has also been criticized by other researchers (Bomer *et al.* 2008; Gorski 2006; Osei-Kofi 2005) who believe it fosters an acceptance rather than critique of the culture of poverty, and that encourages deficit thinking, or blaming the poor for being poor. Davis' language echoes this critique when it implies that a poor student or his family is at fault, that "he cannot help who his family is."

The final type of response to the topic of social class came from one student who claimed to "sit back" during discussions about social class, largely because of his or her own affluent background and current practice in an affluent district. This student, whom we'll call Taylor, said:

> It is interesting for me to sit back and listen to the discussions that take place…. My experience with most of the topics, social class included, is limited. I grew up in an upper middle class family. I felt secure in my basic needs. Education was something that was valued from even before I stepped on the school bus for my first class. My parents instilled a strong work ethic in me that carried over into my schooling.… Again, it is interesting to me to listen to some of the experiences in other schools. While I have very little experience with a large population of low SES students, I do have strategies to promote achievement in all students. …It is important to become a sponge and absorb what I can.

Our interpretation is that this future leader doesn't see his or her own class identity or its impact on students. While the number of poor students in Taylor's district may be lower than others, all schools experienced an achievement gap between those students and their more affluent peers, including Taylor's school. As a future leader Taylor does need to "promote achievement in all students" and can not merely "sit back."

Implementation Plans about Social Class

While initial reflections upon social class were varied, as described above, as these future administrators wrote a vision and five-year implementation plan addressing the needs in their schools, seven of the ten specifically mentioned the needs of students of low socioeconomic status. The remaining three plans focused instead on the achievement gap generally and on addressing the needs of special education students. For example, Miller wrote that "the most compelling data in the building" was that "nearly 12% of the students are of low socioeconomic status." Miller continued:

> Most buildings in the neighbouring school districts would not see this [percentage] as compelling. Here, though, amidst a stigma of most in the community of being of middle to high SES, this number becomes important to address. It is especially important as comparison of [test] results show low SES students are nearly 20% less proficient in reading comprehension and math.

Miller's goal for improving the achievement of low SES students included professional development using *Classroom Instruction that Works* (Marzano *et al.* 2001) and *A Framework for Understanding Poverty* (Payne 2005); common planning time; teaming; and principal evaluations of teaching to form a "cultural shift" in the school. As mentioned earlier, while Payne's work has been controversial, it continues to be popular in districts around this state.

Overall there seemed to be some growth among students from their initial reflections to their implementation plans. When they first reflected upon their own experience with social class, they relied heavily on their own experience and their depth of understanding, including class-blind responses and Miller's "sitting back" response. Yet when they were asked to develop goals for their districts and an implementation plan, the majority of them recognized a need to address the achievement gap between their students of low socioeconomic students and their more affluent students. Thus personal reflection combined

with collecting data about their own district and a requirement to devise a goals and implementation plan seemed to provide the opportunity for these aspiring administrators to practice social justice leadership around the area of poverty and social class.

Race and Ethnicity

This state tends be mostly White, with non-White K-12 student enrolment at only 13.4% in 2005-2006, although even that low number has more than doubled from the 5% it was in 1985-1986 (2007). There have been larger enrolments in the last two years state-wide from African American (up 6.7%), Latino/a (up 9.9%), and Asian American (up 4.5%) students. This particular cohort of aspiring administrators is located near one of the state's urban centres, so they have higher enrolments of students of colour in their schools than the rest of the state does.

Like the reflections on social class, the reflections on race and ethnicity were varied. The assigned analysis for the race/ethnicity equity audit required students to "discuss the problems" with these two quotes: "I don't even see the person's colour," and "But we do not have, or have very few, students of colour in our school/district so race isn't an issue here." One might thus expect that students would write about colour blindness in their school, and indeed, seven mentioned it explicitly and two referred to it indirectly. Four students critiqued the phrases in light of the staff and culture at their schools. Representative of this kind of critique was this response:

> The school is very White. For that reason many of the staff do not believe that there are any race problems at this school. In fact, I have heard teachers comment that even if they did have a larger population of minority students, that there would be no problem because they would not see the colour of the students' skin, but would focus on the student themselves regardless of that colour. …Most of the people who believe that they can disregard a person's skin colour must not believe that they need to get to know their students before they can connect what they need to learn to that student. If you disregard a main part of who a person is, how can a teacher connect with that student and find out what they need in order to achieve?

Like this aspiring administrator, other students also talked about how teachers must acknowledge the individual or "the integral part of a person" in order to foster a connection with students and improve student achievement. One student talked about the importance of race within any school:

> No matter how many or few students of colour there are in a school, race is an issue within that school. If there are few students, they may stand out more as being different than if there are many students and the cultures are more equally mixed throughout the school. I think that there is more of a challenge to ensure those students feel a part of the culture of the building and a part of the mix of students when there are only a few of them in the school.

This student suggested that changing a school's culture could include character education, counselling, modelling acceptance, and inclusion.

One future leader spoke of the stereotypes his or her urban school faces from the community:

> The district is diverse. One problem that this school faces is that stereotypes by the community continue to oppress the success of these students. I often hear people talk about [name of school] and the issues that urban schools are facing. They say things like, "Isn't it rough there?" or "They don't pay you enough to work in those schools." The community seems to buy into this negative stigma that surrounds this school. …I think it is important as a leader in my school to be a positive role model to all stakeholders. Being White, I have to be aware of my own biases and not think poorly of those that are different than I am. As teachers it is our responsibility to find the strengths of all students and members of our community and help create a culture that accepts all and denies no one of success.

Another student also voiced frustration with his or her community, saying that "[school name] is no longer a 'lily white' school district, and this has been tough for some in the community and schools to stomach, more out of ignorance, a key element in racism."

Naming certain behaviours, including their own, as racist was another theme that emerged. One student wrote about race/ethnicity:

> This has been a humbling topic for me as I grow professionally. While never one [who] professed to completely understand those that were of a different race than myself and wholeheartedly exclaimed to not be racist, it appears that my lack of understanding may have contributed to some form of segregation. I have always been a person to look at people for who they are, not the colour of their skin. In doing so, however, I created a comparison between the norms I established for myself – being a White middle-class male – and the perceived norms of

> others. It wasn't until these graduate classes that I realized there is no such thing as normal. My thoughts have shifted to not seeing people of colour for who they are but rather recognizing the difference and finding out more about their experiences.

This student's acknowledgement of his own racism was echoed by two other students, both of whom were also White.

As an example of the contrast between these experiences of White students and that of the one student of colour in the course, that student talked about his or her experience as a minority in a dominant culture, explaining that he or she is "very acute to people's perceptions and attitudes about race and culture. …I always feel like I have to prove myself or do more and be more distinguished in order to meet people's standard." White students did not mention such "proving."

Three students mentioned their White privilege. One mentioned that privilege within the context of learning from classes in the administrative program:

> It wasn't until I took my first administrative class on culture that I began to realize that I was racist. I still don't think of myself as a KKK member and I don't have open hatred of anyone, however, I do no realize that some of the things that I do and say are racist, as well as the idea of White privilege. I have never thought of myself as White and in fact I have never thought that I have achieved anything because of my colour until I took that class. It then dawned on me that some of the things that I have or at least the ease of how I attained them is because I am White. I also realize now that saying, "I have a friend who is Black" or "I don't see colour" or asking a person of a different race to speak for their entire race is racist. I still don't like to call myself that and I still have a long way to go into making myself understand this issue, but I feel that I have come a long way because of these classes.

As researchers and teachers, the authors are pleased by this student's self-acknowledgement, as well as by the idea that his of her leadership coursework might have actually contributed to this student's self-learning. However, we can not claim that all our students have experienced this kind of growth.

Davis appeared in written analysis to claim colour blindness, writing that

> People are so stuck on how others look that they can't see the person. Are they wearing the right clothes? Do they have the latest hairstyle? Are they skinny or heavy? Are they White or Black

> or Hispanic or Asian? We are all put together the same way, breathe the same air, and have a desire to be liked and part of something. Our schema may be different, but we can still relate to each other in some way. We all have feelings that can be hurt. We all innately have the desire to learn as we start from day one and continue until we die. …My students are very special to me. I don't let one incident or two detract me from getting a chance to know a child. I take the time to know each one and what they feel is important to them. It doesn't matter to me what colour they are. I like the inside the best – the heart and soul of the child.

Davis is dedicated to his or her students, but, as in the reflection on social class, Davis seems to be missing the point that students' racial or ethnic identity might be important to them, even if it's not important to Davis as a teacher or leader. If Davis is going to "know each one and what they feel is important to them," racial or ethnic identity will likely be part of that knowledge.

There were also three students who wrote about race and ethnicity in what Edler and Irons (2002) refer to as a "distancing behaviour by White people," that of identifying the people of colour they have known and been friends with over the years. Said one of a childhood experience with the migrant farm workers that worked on the student's family's farm:

> When I was about eight years old I remember seeing a little girl playing by her family's car that was by our farmhouse. I asked my mom if I could ask her if she wanted to play and she said, "Yes"!! We were the best of friends instantly and set up a lemonade stand for all the people that were working in the fields, especially her own family. We became penpals for a while and then I lost touch with her.

From the context as outlined above, the authors' interpretation is that this aspiring leader is female, and that her experience with another little girl from a different background was an extremely positive one. While it is tempting to wish that she would acknowledge or question the power differential that undergirded her friendship with the daughter of one of her family's farm workers, perhaps such an analysis would change or tarnish what seems to be a happy memory for her. We were left with that disquieting sensation repeatedly as we read of our other White students' pleasant experiences with people of colour. One student wrote

about his or her friends from non-White ethnic groups and said, “The best part for me was getting to be good enough friends with each of them that we could have open conversations about their heritage and culture.” This statement has to be taken at face value, though it would be interesting to know what topics those “open conversations” covered and what insights resulted.

Finally, Baker, the same student who self-identified as “mixed” in his or her beliefs about social class also seemed to be working through his or her values and beliefs about race and ethnicity. Baker began his or her reflection by relating childhood and college experiences with non-White students, noting that he or she didn’t “recall thinking about the colour of their skin until later in junior high.” Then he or she said:

> Thinking about my values and beliefs about race/ethnicity is very difficult. I do not believe that I view people of another colour differently. At least this is my perspective. I have never had trouble making friends in college or the workfield with adults of a different race. I work with many families from a variety of race/ethnic groups. Is this my way of being oblivious about differences? I am always worried that I will offend someone from another race or that I will say the wrong thing. I try to be careful and I try to be understanding but I realize that not being a person of another race than White that I have no idea what it is like to feel like an outsider. Again, I try to educate myself about the issues surrounding race during my social interactions and my professional interactions.
>
> I believe that everyone would like to think of themselves as an equal opportunist in the area of race. However, I also know that you cannot take culture of Whites out of a person. I know that certain things are easier for me and that some things come easier to me because I am White. I do not like this philosophically, but I do not know how to change it, either. I figure that by trying to improve my interactions with others that I am making a difference in someone’s life. I am not causing more grief or hardship with people of another race. Is this selfish? I do not know. Should I be working towards more equity at a global level? Probably, but it is not something that I feel one person can do much about. I just want to be a good person and do the right thing with the friends that I have and the families that I work with. At least, I can see the impact I have with them.

While Baker says that it is “difficult” to think about beliefs about race and ethnicity, Baker’s writing reveals someone trying to understand the impact that race/ethnicity has on his or her educational practice, recognizing that his or her perspective might be wrong (“At least that is my perspective”), trying to evaluate his or her current working experiences and relationships with people of colour, and still questioning them (“Is this my way of being oblivious about

differences?"). Baker also acknowledges worrying about being offensive, trying to be careful and understanding, and realizing that as a White person, he or she can never understand what it is like to be a racial outsider. Baker acknowledges White privilege, but also that he or she doesn't know how to change it. At the end, Baker seems to decide that since it's not clear what he or she can do globally, he or she can at least act locally, being "a good person" and doing "the right thing with the friends I have and the families that I work with."

One way to consider further what Baker decided he or she could do to act locally was to analyze Baker's vision and implementation plan. That plan identifies as one goal to maintain test scores at above a 75% proficiency level for students of low socioeconomic status and English as a second language. It suggests continuous staff development to meet that goal as well as more multicultural resources available for students and an ongoing data collection cycle to evaluate progress. These steps indicate that perhaps Baker has found some manageable next steps to take action within the school setting.

Reflections about Leading for Social Justice

One theme that emerged from three students' written assignments was their desire to work in their schools for social justice ends. Some of the reflections already reported above mention the writer's desire to become a better teacher, but there were also reflections which mentioned the writer's desire to become a better leader. Malone, who wrote about the deficit-thinking about social class within his or her school building, also wrote:

> What is missing at [school name] is a leader that is willing to challenge current ways of thinking. A principal that promotes equity and social justice. Build a school that is supportive of all students and the families that come through the school doors. As an administrator it is my responsibility to lead my staff and school in the area of achievement for ALL students. It is not enough to say it, but it must be modelled. A leader at this school will need to be visual and advocate for kids with a passion. A school culture has to be formed around empowering teachers to act and teach with the mindset that this is what is best for all students. Leaders transform schools, teachers, and students to be high achievers.

Malone was the only future leader to use the term "social justice" explicitly in written work.

These future leaders all aimed for leadership and schools which are successful in terms of promoting student achievement. One future leader wrote in response to the race/ethnicity audit that "meeting the needs of minority students is essential for a successful school," then added, "More importantly, it is the morally correct thing to do." This idea of a moral imperative dovetails with both social justice literature and the work of organizational theorists such as Sergiovanni (1992) and Fullan (2003).

Discussion and Implications

Leadership for Social Justice

As noted earlier, the literature on social justice leadership has consistently defined one goal of social justice leadership to be reducing the achievement gap that has long existed between students of lower socioeconomic status and their affluent peers and between students of colour and their White peers. The one social justice end that students in this principal preparation program all seemed committed to was equity of student achievement. While their written thoughts about their personal experiences of social class or race and ethnicity varied in their complexity and understanding, their reflections from the equity audit assignment all indicated students' realization that there is an achievement gap for both students of low socioeconomic status and students of colour. Further, all of their vision and five-year implementation plans addressed that achievement gap. These results answer the first question of this research, which was how students respond to particular pedagogical practices. In this course, those pedagogical practices included reading, in-class discussions, written reflections, an equity audit and analysis, and a goals and implementation plan. In response, these aspiring leaders all seemed to reach a common goal of driving towards

increased student achievement for all groups in their district. Even when their early reflections on social class or race and ethnicity revealed considerable variation in their understanding of these issues, including "blindness," "sitting back," and stereotyping, the structuring of assignments which required them to collect school data, analyze it, and develop a plan eventually focused all of them on specific strategies and actions for their district.

This structuring of experience and assignment echoes the three goals that Bell and Griffin (1997) recommend for designing social justice education courses. They state that courses are to increase personal awareness, expand knowledge, and encourage action. This course's combination of reflection, readings, data analysis, and assigned action plans seems to have fulfilled those three goals.

The other question this research sought to answer was what aspiring administrators currently think about poverty and race/ethnicity. While this article offers specific examples, the summary answer to this question seems to be that there is no single way in which future administrators think about these issues, except when, as noted above, they recognize that equity is a problem that needs to be addressed. Otherwise, some are more reflective than others, and some are more sensitive to their students' and community's needs than others.

One implication of these findings for preparation programs which wish to train educational leaders to lead for social justice is that asking future leaders to reflect upon their personal experiences and beliefs around poverty and race and ethnicity seems to be helpful when it is accompanied by assignments which also require future leaders to analyze data and create an action plan to redress inequities. The need to combine reflection *with* experience and action is a hallmark of other literature on experiential learning and multicultural

education (Hackman 2005; Mezirow 1997; Osterman and Kottkamp 1993; Schön 1983). Evidence from the research here with future administrators reinforces that combination of reflection and action. It was not enough for these administrators simply to reflect upon poverty or race and ethnicity in the abstract or in light of their own personal experience. Their stand-alone reflections indicated the range of their own sophistication and sensitivity to others not like themselves, some of which was decidedly on the unsophisticated, insensitive side. If left at that, the course *might* have inspired some critical reflection and eventual action. However, what was apparently more compelling to them was to expand their personal experience by asking them to analyze data from their own school districts, reflect upon their findings, and then devise an action plan. The pedagogical technique requiring students to reflect, analyze, and implement using an equity audit -- such as this one by Capper, Frattura and Keyes -- appears to work. Future leaders' thinking was transformed from the introspective to the extrospective. This is the kind of knowledge and practice that social justice leaders need.

Since the demographic makeup of the U.S. is becoming more diverse, not less, it is more incumbent upon preparation programs to ensure that graduates can indeed lead in diverse settings. Given the nearly all-White demographic of the aspiring administrators in this program, the second implication of this research is that Anglo students with – by their own accounts -- limited personal experience of poverty or racial and ethnic diversity can be taught to focus on equitable student achievement for students in poverty and students of colour. Regardless of their depth of insight about poverty or about race and class, they saw a need to narrow the achievement gap and were able to devise steps to meet that need.

In this regard, the strict focus on student achievement that has resulted from recent accountability legislation in the U.S. and the U.K. works to reinforce the lessons that multicultural and social justice educators have been trying to teach for decades. While multicultural educators have been trying to change the hearts and minds and dispositions of middle class White leaders and teachers so that they care about the achievement of poor students and students of colour, governments have proceeded directly to what middle class White leaders and teachers *must* do, or else face sanctions and shaming. Thus the third implication of this research is the observation that efforts of educational leadership programs to prepare leaders to close the achievement gap do align with federal mandates and are bound to get future administrators' attention, regardless of their personal views or experiences with diversity.

Future Research

While this study is useful for beginning to answer the questions of what aspiring administrators are thinking about poverty and race or ethnicity and what pedagogical practices might get them to change their thinking, it is missing a follow-up on what these leaders might actually *do* in their jobs as future leaders. Does this reflection / analysis / implementation plan paradigm actually translate into social justice leadership along the lines of the leaders described by Theoharis (2007)? Does it make a difference for their students' achievement? There is very little research tracing the paths of social justice leaders from preparation programs to the schools in which they practice, perhaps because it would require a longitudinal case study, which would be both time-consuming and expensive. However, such case studies would yield rich description of the challenges leaders face, which preparation programs could use to modify courses and internships as needed.

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